

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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R 310910Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4956

INFO AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

S E C R E T ALGIERS 1899

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SS, AG, MO, MR

SUBJECT: SAHARA: ALGERIAN VIEWS

1. HAD LONG CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENTIAL COUNSELOR ISMAIL HAMDANI ON SPANISH SAHARA QUESTION AFTERNOON JULY 29TH. GIS OF HAMDANI'S REMARKS, COMMENTING ON RECENT MILITARY CLASHES IN SAHARA AND KING'S BIRTHDAY SPEECH, WAS THAT ALGERIANS WELL AWARE THERE POSSIBILITY MOROCCO MIGHT ATTACK THEM AS REACTION TO CONTINUING GUERILLA HOSTILITIES. WAR, IF IT CAME, WOULD BE EASIER FOR ALGERIANS THAN MOROCCANS BECAUSE LATTER HAD TO GAIN TERRITORY IN ORDER TO HAVE VICTORY. ALGERIANS NEEDED ONLY TO DEFEND WHAT THEY HAD. THEY HAD NO INTENTION ATTACKING FIRST. THEIR POSTURE DEFENSIVE AND THEY NOT PARTICIPATING IN POLISARIO ATTACKS BUT MERELY SUPPLYING THEM WITH FOOD AND EQUIPMENT. WHETHER OR NOT HASSAN WAS VICTOR IN WAR, HIS DAYS WOULD BE NUMBERED. HIS DAYS NUMBERED IN ANY EVENT BECAUSE OF INTERNAL SITUATION, BUT WAR WOULD PRECIPITATE REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES IN AREA PERHAPS AFFECTING MAURITANIA AND TUNISIA AS WELL. SUCH CHANGES WOULD NOT REALLY BE IN ANYONE'S INTEREST EXCEPT POSSIBLY SOVIETS.

2. HAMDANI SAID ALGERIANS DEVOTED TO PRINCIPLE OF NATIONAL
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INDEPENDENCE WHICH SECRETARY KISSINGER HIMSELF HAD INVOKED

IN HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH BOUMEDIENE. THEY DID NOT WANT TO BE DEPENDENT ON ANYONE AND WANTED KEEP THEIR TERRITORY TO THEMSELVES. IF, HOWEVER, AMERICAN MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO MOROCCO WAS OF SUCH NATURE AS TO OVERWHELM ALGERIANS, THEY MIGHT BE FORCED TO TURN TO SOVIETS IN SELF DEFENSE; THAT WOULD BE UNFORTUNATE FOR ALL OF US. WITH REGARD AMERICAN ASSISTANCE TO MOROCCANS, ALGERIANS DID NOT BELIEVE WHAT WE SAID ABOUT TRADITIONAL SUPPLY RELATIONSHIPS AND ARMS AGREEMENTS DATING FROM BEFORE CRISIS. THEY WELL AWARE WE SUPPLYING MOROCCANS ONE WAY OR ANOTHER WITH CONSIDERABLY MORE THAN WE HAD ORIGINALLY AGREED TO. (BENHABYLES ALSO REFERRED WITH SOME ASPERITY TO TRIANGULAR DEALS INVOLVING IRAN AND JORDAN IN OUR JULY 26 TALK.)

3. HAMDANI SAID ALGERIANS STILL COULD SEE NO SOLUTION FOR SAHARA WHICH DID NOT EMBODY PRINCIPLE OF SELF-DETERMINATION. ALGERIAN POSITION THIS RESPECT HAD BEEN CONSISTENT THOUGHOUT AND STORY OF ALLEGED TAPE RECORDING OF PRESIDENT'S REMARKS AT RABAT SIMPLY DID NOT HOLD WATER. BOUMEDIENE HAD NEVER ABANDONED PRINCIPLE OF SELF-DETERMINATION AND NEVER WOULD. IT WAS ONE OF PILLARS OF REVOLUTION. THERE COULD BE NO HOPE OF SOLUTION UNLESS HASSAN WAS READY TO ADMIT THAT DOSSIER WAS STILL OPEN AND TO DISCUSS MEANS BY WHICH RIGHT OF SELF-DETERMINATION COULD BE EXERCISED. REFUSAL TO EVEN DISCUSS QUESTION MEANT ALL DOORS WERE CLOSED, AND THAT ALGERIA WAS EXPECTED TO ACCEPT FAIT ACCOMPLI IMPOSED BY MILITARY FORCE. THIS IT WOULD NEVER DO. U.S. HAD GREAT INFLUENCE IN MOROCCO BECAUSE OF SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP AND KING FEARED US. WE SHOULD USE THAT INFLUENCE TO GET DOORS OPENED.

4. I ASKED HAMDANI WHETHER WE ALSO HAD INFLUENCE IN ALGERIA. HE SAID OUR OPINIONS WERE LISTENED TO AND TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION. CARDS WE COULD PLAY WERE NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE AND SELF-DETERMINATION. THAT WOULD INFLUENCE ALGERIANS.

5. COMMENT: HAMDANI GAVE IMPRESSION ALGERIANS FATALISTICALLY AWAITING EVENTS, BEING CONFIDENT OF THEIR ABILITY TO DEAL WITH WHATEVER MAY COME THEIR WAY. IT NOT CLEAR, HOWEVER, SECRET

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THAT THEY FULLY UNDERSTAND RISKS THEY RUNNING AS RESULT POLISARIO ACTIVITIES. APPARENT DEMOBILISATION IN RECENT MONTHS OF SOME OF RESERVES CALLED UP LAST FALL WOULD INDICATE THEY DO NOT REALLY EXPECT AN ATTACK. WE GATHER FROM RABAT'S REPORTING AND FROM VISITING JOURNALIST (HENRY GINIGER OF NY TIMES), HOWEVER, THAT MOROCCAN PATIENCE RUNNING OUT AND THAT HASSAN WILL NOT TOLERATE SAHARAN HEMORRHAGE INDEFINITELY. WE UNABLE JUDGE HOW

ACUTE PRESSURES ON HIM ARE, OR MOROCCAN MILITARY CAPABILITIES
FOR ACTION AGAINST ALGERIS, BUT HAVE IMPRESSION HOSTILITIES
MORE LIKELY TODAY THAN THEY WERE THREE MONTHS AGO.

6 WE SHARE HAMDANI'S BELIEF HOSTILITIES IN NO ONE'S
INTEREST, AND CERTAINLY NOT OURS. IT IS OF COURSE POSSIBLE
THAT NO PROGRESS TOWARDS PEACEFUL SOLUTION IS POSSIBLE
UNTIL THERE IS MORE BLOODLETTERING, BUT LEBANON ILLUSTRATES
DANGER OF LETTING SUCH PROCESS COMMENCE. BELIEVE IT IS TIME
WE MADE NEW ASSESSMENT, (A) OF RISKS OF WAR AND (B) POSSIBLE
COURSES OF ACTION TO PREVENT IT IF WE THINK RISK IS REAL.
IN PARTICULAR, BELIEVE WE SHOULD THOROUGHLY CONSIDER WHETHER
WE ARE PREPARED ASSUME MEDIATORY ROLE. FULLY REALIZE THERE
IS NO ASSURANCE WHATSOEVER WE COULD BE SUCCESSFUL, BUT
MOROCCANS AND ALGERIANS LOOK BADLY IN NEED OF DEUS EX
MACHINA, AND UNITED STATES IS ONLY POWER WHICH CAN PLAY
THAT ROLE TO ANY EFFECT TODAY. PARKER

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